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Conference Abstract

Re-connecting Communities in Biodiverse Places to their Biological Heritage: The case of iguanas on Grand Cayman

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Abstract

For centuries, naturalists from the Global North have traveled southwards to collect specimens of species from regions where there were many. The legacy of this is that the large natural history collections and the biodiverse regions of the world are often distant from one another. The unique and often disappearing species and ecosystems in these regions need conservation, yet much of the data on this biodiversity resides in collections and with the experts that work in them, rather than in the countries where it is needed.

In this poster we zoom in on Grand Cayman, a small island in the Caribbean, facing severe threats to its endemic biodiversity - from habitat loss to introduced species. More specifically we focus on the endemic blue iguana (*Cyclura lewisi*) and the invasive green iguana (*Iguana iguana*). Specimens from the Cayman Islands are dispersed over American

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and European natural history collections and give data on the species present, their abundances and the interactions among those species (e.g. their food plants and parasites). Such data can be used in risk assessments and conservation planning, and the specimens themselves can inform research, such as population genetics.

While the Cayman Islands are small they provide an excellent case study of the issues of conservation, society, climate and other environmental change in the tropics. Islands are highly sensitive to environmental change, but the lessons learned from them can be extended to other areas, including continents. On this poster, we describe the *From Blue Iguanas to Blue Vervain* project (Fig. 1), which aims to connect the biodiverse Caribbean UK Overseas Territories of Montserrat and the Cayman Islands with natural science collections around the world. We aim to learn ways to address issues of access and benefit-sharing, particularly how residents of these biodiverse places can benefit from the data and research linked to specimens originating in their islands.

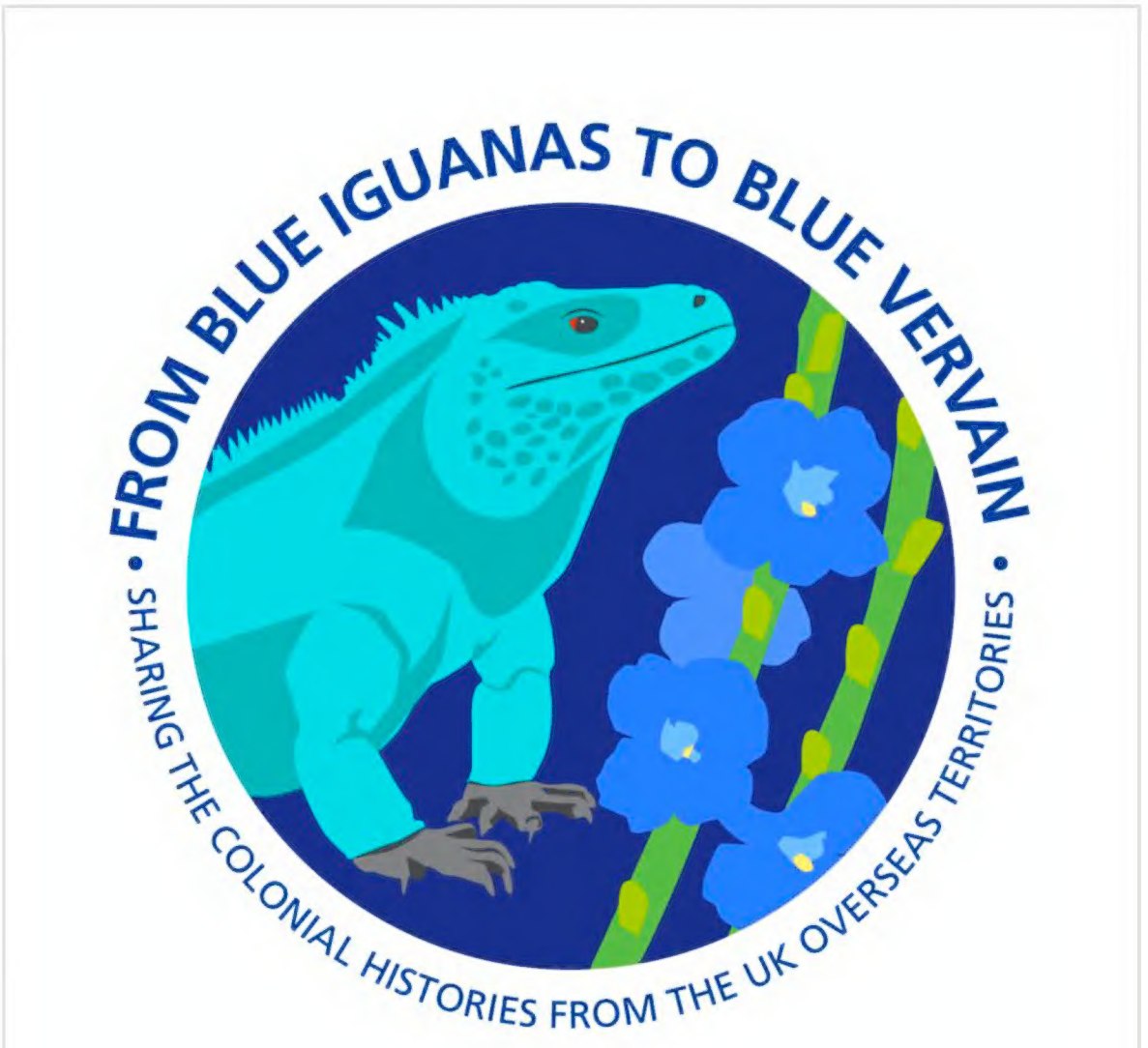

Figure 1.

"From blue iguanas to blue vervain: sharing the colonial histories from the UK Overseas Territories": a project funded by the UKRI Arts & Humanities Research Council and Natural Environment Research Council (grant reference AH/W008998/1).

Keywords

Natural history collections, invasive species, Caribbean UK Overseas Territories, access and benefit-sharing, islands, species interactions, Cayman Islands, Blue Iguana, Iguana iguana.

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